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Andrew Johnson

NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE

By
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Revised Reprint From

Tennessee Historical Quarterly

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ON AUGUST 3, 1875 a stately funeral procession moved through the streets of Greeneville, its destination the cone-shaped summit of Signal Hill in the western edge of the city to which Andrew Johnson, according to family tradition, was wont to go for relaxation and meditation. Now, as he had requested in life, this site was to be his last resting place. One notable feature of the day was the presence of an exceedingly large number of what were known as the "plain people." The farmers and mechanics, the honest yeomanry, were out in force, and showed unmistakably the hold he had upon that class. He had been one of them, traveling over the same path of daily toil that they had tread, and knew how to sympathize with them in their hardships. Their mute and inexpressible grief told how they regarded his death. A bouquet of white lilies and roses, held together by white satin ribbon, bearing the mottoes, "THE PEOPLE'S FRIEND," "HE SLEEPETH" was laid on the grave.

Thus the career of the former tailor, alderman, mayor, governor, congressman, senator, vice-president, and president had come to an end. But he was not to be forgotten by the people among whom he had lived for the past fifty years.

Andrew Johnson's association with Greeneville is today memorialized by three separate areas which make up Andrew Johnson National Historic Site—the Visitor Center complex which includes a museum, the tailor shop which he operated during his early manhood and a house in which he lived from around 1838 to 1851; the homestead which includes the house in which he lived from 1851 until 1875; and the cemetery on Monument Hill where he is buried. In a sense these areas are symbolic of his career: the tailor shop of his democratic principles and humble origin; the homestead of his unaffected attitudes concerning unpretentious living, of particular importance when viewed from the vantage point of what he could have afforded in the later years of his political success; and the cemetery, with its towering monument, of the respect and admiration of the people he served.

The arrival of Andrew Johnson in Greeneville evolved from a boyish prank played by him and other Raleigh, North Carolina, companions. In 1824 at the age of sixteen Andy's youthful

exuberance led him into trouble. Mrs. Wells, a lady living in Raleigh, had two "right smart" daughters that apparently attracted the attention of Andrew and others. One Saturday night Andy and others "chucked" the old lady's house. Learning the boys names, Mrs. Wells sent word she intended to "persecute" them for throwing rocks at her windows. Very much frightened at such a threat Andy and others, including his brother William who was likewise articled to a tailor named Selby, left Raleigh.

Selby immediately advertised for the Johnson boys, offering a reward of \$10.00 for their delivery, "or I will give the above reward for Andrew Johnson alone."

Being aware of the North Carolina law concerning the harboring and employing of a runaway apprentice, Johnson only stayed within the State for a short period of time before moving to South Carolina. Johnson must have been reluctant to leave his native state, but had no other choice when Selby refused to release him from the apprenticeship. He now determined to take the great venture and move the entire family to Tennessee.

At the age of seventeen, Andrew had already become the accepted head of the family. His mother depended upon his judgment, and his stepfather (Turner Dougherty) was willing to do whatever he said. In the month of August (1826), the Johnsons sold or gave away what possessions they could not load in a rude cart and set out on the long and dusty road. It was no easy journey, this westward path across the Smokies. The humble party made its way across the mountains and reached the green-clad valleys of upper East Tennessee in September of 1826. Some writers state that Johnson spent his first night in Greeneville, camping on the grounds of his last home. Less than a year later, on May 17, 1827, Johnson married Eliza McCardle, the ceremony being performed by Squire Mordecai Lincoln, a distant cousin of Abraham Lincoln. Eliza had a good education for this period and many have paid tribute to the help she gave Andrew in his never ceasing efforts to acquire an education.

At the time of their marriage Andy had his shop in the front room of a two-room building on Main Street; the back room served as his kitchen, dining room, parlor and bedchamber. In this building Andrew and Eliza reportedly lived until 1831 when, through his rigid economy, he was able to think of buying a house. On February 24, 1831, he attended a court sale and purchased a

dwelling and a smith shop on Water Street. Tradition holds that he soon purchased a Main Street building and moved it to the smith lot, where it was transformed into the famous tailor shop.

Whether the tailor shop is in reality a building foreign to the smith lot or whether it is the original smith shop converted, is unknown—tradition bolsters the former. Regardless of which is correct, this new shop replaced the front room previously used, and in it Johnson continued his quest for knowledge.

Presumably Johnson would have lived in the brick house just across the street from the tailor shop, which stands on the lot mentioned in the 1831 sale. This conflicts with tradition for many believe that Johnson lived in a small frame building which stood on the smith lot just in back of his tailor shop. It would be good to know the exact history concerning these structures, but the significance of the area does not hinge on the exactness of when each building was acquired. Rather, it rests upon the individual whose role in history has engendered their historical status.

Between the years of 1831 and 1843 a very active tailoring business was conducted in the Johnson Tailor Shop. As Robert Winston has described it, "Located under his own vine and fig tree, Andy strove harder than ever in the work of his trade. Every garment must be a perfect fit, there must be no dissatisfied customer; the Andrew Johnson brand of clothes was to become a guarantee of good workmanship. More and more the Andy Johnson tailor shop became the center of village politics, the gathering place for cornfield philosophers, and the most talked about establishment in East Tennessee. To keep himself posted on public affairs, Andy employed a reader, paying him fifty cents a day to read aloud while he worked at the bench. Current newspapers, speeches of Senators and Congressmen, Government reports, and such books as could be borrowed were thus read aloud and devoured by the ambitious man."¹

During his early days in Greeneville, Johnson formed close friendships with the working class of people. It was this group that found it more and more inviting to attend the tailor shop discussions. The most important question tackled was who should run Greeneville, the aristocrats or the democrats, the money interests or the laborers? This matter was brought to a head in the spring of 1829 when the mechanics and laborers brought out for

¹ Robert W. Winston, *Andrew Johnson, Plebeian and Patriot* (New York, 1928), 22.

the position of alderman, Andrew Johnson, the town tailor. He made such a good alderman that he was reelected several times and also served as mayor.

Between the years of 1829 and 1843 Johnson's time was spent in such activities as the State Convention of 1834 which abolished property qualifications for office seekers and imprisonment for debt, and made a fuller guarantee of freedom of speech. His belief in dealing fairly with all classes, and his desire for economy in government aided in his being recognized as a promising Democratic leader. His desire for equality among all classes can best be stated in his own words, "Gladly I would lay down my life if I could so engrafft democracy into our general government that it would be permanent."²

From 1835 to 1837 and from 1839 to 1843 Johnson served the State of Tennessee faithfully as Representative and later as Senator. Defeat for the 1837-39 term as Representative was caused by his outspoken resistance to an internal improvement bill which he termed a "system of wholesale fraud." His analysis of the law proved to be correct and in 1839 he returned to the House. In the presidential campaign in 1840 Johnson supported Van Buren. Although Van Buren was defeated, Johnson earned the reputation of being a capable political combatant, not only in East Tennessee, but statewide. In 1843 the First Congressional District of Tennessee nominated him for the National House of Representatives. Competition and questionable oratory of an opponent always seemed to awaken the keen mind of Johnson and once again he out-polled the Whig candidate. Through capable oratory and by matching wits with the leading Whigs of the day, Johnson, the Democrat, was realizing a steady political growth.

After 1843 the Tailor Shop no longer played an important role in the life of Andrew Johnson, but needless to say, the friendships formed, the self-education and development acquired here were to be of lasting value to this tailor-politician. Between 1843 and 1921 the tailor shop building served for a period of time as a shop for another proprietor and later as a residence, but always it remained in the ownership of Johnson and his descendants.

In 1921 an act to appropriate money for the purchase of President Andrew Johnson's tailor shop, and the lot upon which it was located was passed by the State of Tennessee. The Tailor Shop was

2. *Ibid.*, 24-25.

enclosed in a brick building and was administered by the State until 1941 when it was conveyed to the United States for National Monument purposes.

Today, the small tailor shop from which Andrew Johnson embarked upon a political career destined to carry him to the Presidency of the United States, stands on its original location. This frame structure, measuring approximately twenty-four feet by fourteen feet, with a high ceiling and steep boarded roof is covered with yellow poplar weatherboarding which shows the effects of the elements in their never ceasing quest to destroy man-made objects. The interior walls are covered with wide pine boards of varied lengths. The flooring is of pine, tongue and grooved boards six, eight and twelve inches wide. There are two doors opposite each other, similar in design except the front doorframe has a stationary glass transom of three panes. There are three windows, one on either side of the front door and one to the left of the rear door when viewed from the front entrance. The two front windows are of six pane over nine pane sashes; the rear window is of six over six pane sashes. One end of the building is equipped with a large fireplace.

Housed in this one room shop are most of the known remaining pieces of equipment used by Andrew Johnson while tailoring. These include his tailoring bench, made for him by his brother William, the stove for heating the tailor's goose, one of his tailoring gooses, a pair of candlemolds, and a water pitcher.

The last Johnson Home, according to verbal tradition in the Johnson-Patterson family, and to available evidence, was erected by or for James Brannon between 1849 and 1851. Whether James Brannon had it built or built it himself is unknown. According to some informants, Brannon was a brick-mason in Greeneville until the Civil War, after which he moved to Georgia. Georgia descendants think of him as a blacksmith, and wagon and buggy builder. George Brannon, his eldest brother, was listed in 1836 as a wagon-maker, and according to his family, was also a brick-mason and builder. He moved to Jefferson City, Tennessee, before the Civil War and built the brick college at Mossy Creek (now Jefferson City). Carson-Newman College at Jefferson City descends from this early institution. It would be reasonable to assume that the Johnson House could have been built by one or more of the Brannons.

When Johnson acquired the property on September 10, 1851, it

consisted of a "parcel of ground lying and being situated on Main Street, in the South West end of the town of Greeneville . . . upon which there is a brick house and other buildings, the same being the present residence of the said James Brannon" and including "a narrow strip of land adjoining the above described lot at the south end of the same, 8 feet wide . . . on which there is a spring house . . . said strip of land and lot . . . now being within the same enclosure and suppose[d] to contain between a half and three quarters of an acre."

For the described property, enlarged and improved, Johnson paid \$950.00 cash and deeded to James Brannon town lot number 77, on the northeast corner of Water (now College) and Main Cross (now Depot) Streets, including Johnson's former two story brick residence.

There are no known records of any kind pertaining to the original construction of the Johnson House. The only acceptable source from which material on the matter can be gleaned is an architectural report by Ernest A. Connally from which most of the facts in this portion of the article are taken. There is only one known early picture or exposure of the Johnson House and it was taken at the time of Johnson's death in 1875. This picture is of the front portion of the home and presents unquestionable evidence of the appearance of this portion of the house some 24 years after Johnson purchased the property.

Architectural evidence shows that the original house of circa 1850 consisted of a simple two-story brick block with a one-story ell extending towards the rear with six rooms above ground and two rooms of a semi-basement nature. The house was set directly upon the street after the Northern Irish fashion common to early Greeneville, Jonesboro and other related settlements. The house was entered through a central stair-hall, flanked by a room on either side, with chimneys at the ends. The same plan was repeated in the second story portion of the block. The ell extended, two steps lower than the first floor of the main block, to a depth of two rooms towards the rear. These two rooms were separated by a chimney-wall. There was necessarily a porch along the northeastern side of the ell, corresponding to the central stair-hall, and this porch wrapped around the end of the ell. The only communication between the kitchen, in the basement, and the dining room, above it, was obviously by means of an outside stair. The house which Congressman Johnson bought in 1851 thus consisted of eight rooms



Andrew Johnson Tailor Shop / Joss Street from H. S.
Early Residence

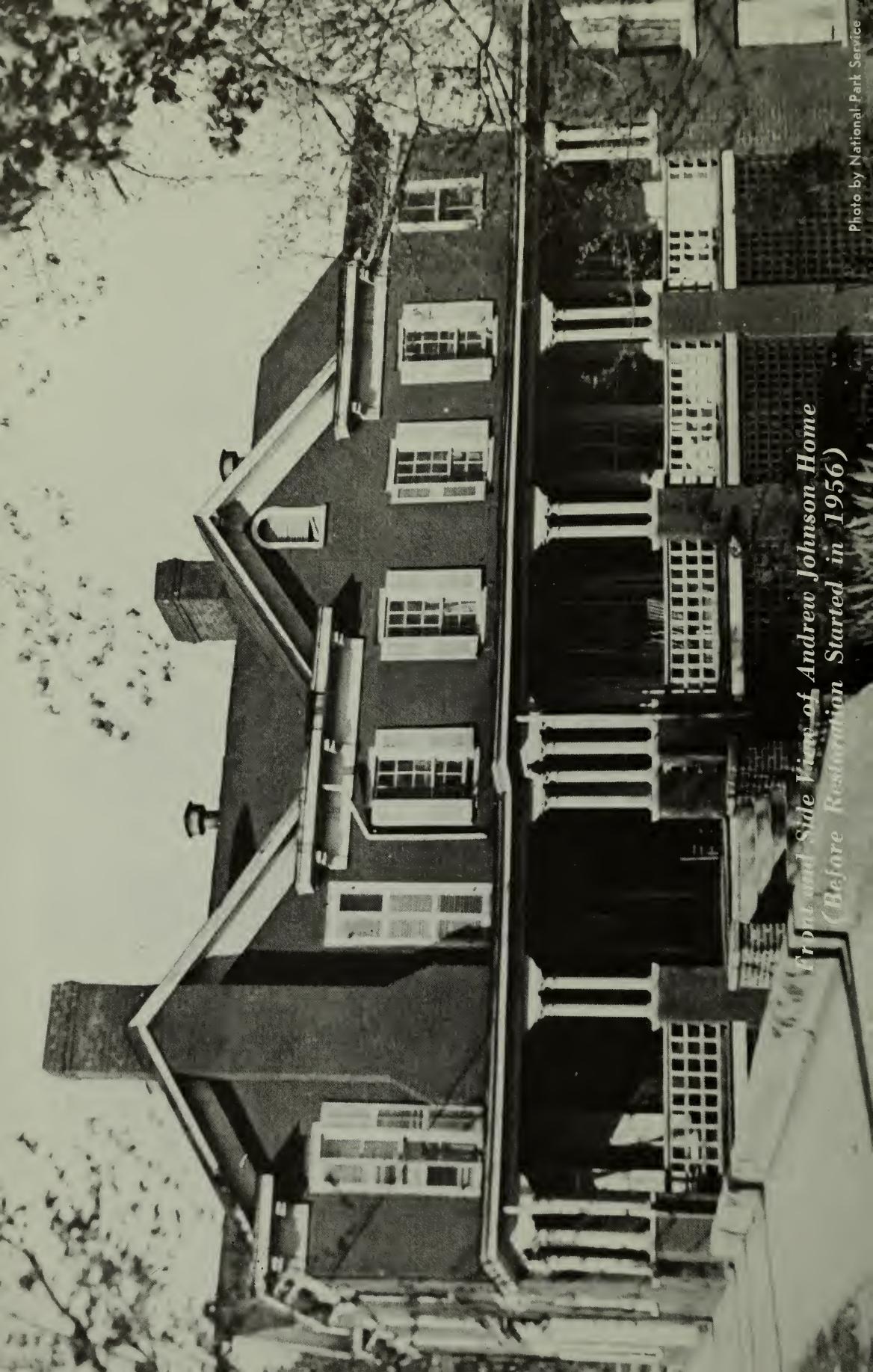


Andrew Johnson
It Appeared in 1875



The Andrew Johnson Home As It Appeared in 1885

Photo by National Park Service



Front and Side View of Andrew Johnson Home
(Before Renovation Started in 1956)



Front and Side View of Andrew Johnson Home
(After Restoration in 1957)

Photo by National Park Service



Back and Side Views of Andrew Johnson's Home
With Restorations



*Back and Side View of Andrew Johnson Home
(After Restoration in 1957)*



Andrew Johnson Tomb

Photo by National Park Service

disposed on three levels.

Family tradition holds that the house was not yet complete when Johnson purchased it in 1851. The degree of incompleteness is not known, but it can be reasoned, since the Brannon deed to Johnson refers to the house as the "present residence of the said James Brannon," that any completion would have been of a minor nature, and confined to interior beautification.

A second-story to the ell and a large porch at the rear were added by Andrew Johnson, probably around 1869-70. This addition was made during a period when Johnson had major repairs done on the entire house. The home had been occupied by Confederate forces and used as a dispensary or lying-in-station for Confederate troops; and it was occupied as late as 1868 by Federal troops. Evidence of the military occupation was left by the soldiers, in pencil, on the plastered walls. The earliest legible date is March 22, 1862, and the latest January 26, 1868, attesting to the lengthy military occupancy. Names of men, companies of both armies, as well as soldierly annotations were quite visible when the wallpaper was removed during the pre-restoration period. One such comment reads: "Andy you had better skedaddle from Nashvill for Lovejoy (?) is after you and if he git you you are a gonner sarten."

Andrew Johnson and his family returned to Greeneville in March of 1869. Mrs. Stover, the widowed daughter, preceded him to Greeneville and made the Johnson Home ready for occupancy. The members of the family who came to live in the "homestead" were the ex-President and Mrs. Johnson and their two sons, Robert and Andrew, Jr. Colonel Robert Johnson died on April 22, 1869, shortly after the family's return; and according to family tradition and the statement of Will Johnson, Andrew Johnson's last surviving slave, Robert died in the room over the dining room. This tends to indicate that the second-story ell would have been completed prior to Johnson's return to Greeneville or between 1868 and early 1869.

With the addition of the second-story ell and porch to correspond, papering the walls of most of the rooms, installing corner cupboards in several of the rooms, replacing broken window glass and repainting the trim, Johnson's house was restored to a livable condition. From here and from a small office up the street he continued his political efforts. His sole desire was that his acts might be unquestionably vindicated. A measure of vindication was realized when in 1874 he was elected to the U. S. Senate; but complete vindication waited until some fifty years after his death when the

Supreme Court ruled "The Tenure of Office Act," the hinge on which the door of impeachment had swung, unconstitutional.

On March 4, 1870, Johnson purchased from his son-in-law, David T. Patterson, a lot of the same width and extending from the Johnson lot to Water Street. This transaction completed Johnson's expansion of the "homestead" property which now measured 111 feet wide and extended from Main Street through the block to Water (now College) Street. It is interesting to note that the legendary camping site of Johnson's first night in Greeneville would be within this plot.

Andrew Johnson died July 31, 1875, leaving an estate estimated to be worth as much as \$200,000. The ex-President died intestate and his widow was appointed administratrix of the estate. No settlement was attempted by her, apparently because of poor health. She died six months later, a victim of consumption. Andrew Johnson, Jr., sole surviving son of Andrew Johnson, was then appointed administrator of the Johnson estate, and on February 21, 1876, Johnson's two daughters deeded to Andrew Johnson, Jr., by partition, their interest in the Homestead of the late president. Then, in March of 1879, Andrew Johnson, Jr., died, without issue and without having settled his father's estate.

The death of Andrew Jr. and his lack of children precipitated some litigation in the settlement of his and his father's estate, particularly regarding the Homestead and presidential effects. By agreement finally reached with the widow of Andrew Jr., Johnson's two daughters, Martha Patterson and Mary Stover, at a sale ordered by the Chancery Court of Greene County, purchased most of the household effects. The fate of the house was finally determined in favor of the two daughters although settlement was complicated by the death of Mary Stover in 1883. Martha Patterson, eldest child of Andrew Johnson, finally became owner of the homestead, achieving her cherished ambition to become the guardian of her father's presidential papers and personal relics.

In approximately one year from the time Martha acquired possession of the house in late 1884, a complete remodeling program was done. Victorian styling was achieved by the addition of gables over the front of the house and the southern flank of the second-story ell; a metal roof was installed; eaves were finished with deep wooden cornice; elaborate wooden pediments were applied over the old wooden lintels of the facade; some windows were lengthened to the floor; the roof line of the existing double

deck veranda was altered in order that the heavy cornice could be placed completely around the house at the same level; a porch was added on the southwest side of the house; and the wall of one room was replaced by a large window extending onto the new porch. The interior was modernized by replacing certain door and window facings; two of the mantels were replaced by something more stylish; a pair of glazed doors were added in the parlor; and the front stairs appear to have been rebuilt during this period of complete renovation. Martha's product was a handsome victorian house, painted dark red with the wooden trim painted green. And due to her efforts—for she was ever willing to show strangers through the house—the Johnson Homestead, early became something of a public shrine.

During the ensuing years, many additional changes were made to the house by Johnson descendants, who continued to live there. The porch on the southwest side was extended to the street, a bay window was added to the dining room, bathrooms were added by enclosing portions of the porches, and many other changes, too numerous to mention, were effected.

The ownership of the house passed from Martha Patterson to her son Andrew Johnson Patterson. During his ownership the house underwent further modernization. A portion of the house was converted into apartments. The grounds of the Homestead were enlarged and built over. The area of the Andrew Johnson Homestead reached its present size, 219 feet on Main Street and 187 feet on Water (College) Street, in the early years of Andrew Patterson's ownership. Two frame houses were built north of the Johnson House, one was purchased south of the House, the Lamons House which formerly stood 10 feet north of Johnson's property was moved down on the home grounds, and three small houses were built on the Water Street frontage, making a total of seven rentals plus the Johnson Home now occupying the enlarged Andrew Johnson Homestead. This was the status of the property in 1942 when the Federal Government purchased the Johnson Homestead from Mrs. A. J. Patterson and daughter Margaret Johnson Patterson.

The Johnson Homestead looks today as it did in the period 1869-75. The tract of land on which the house stands has a 219-foot frontage on Main Street and extends through the block to College Street, with a frontage there of 187 feet. The home is a two-story front block structure of brick with a two-story brick ell extending two rooms deep. The ell extends one room wide from

the rear of the block, flush with the southwest side thereof. The facade contains three windows in the second story and two windows below; the unbroken roof line is parallel to the street. A double-deck veranda flanks the back side of the basic block, the northeast side of the ell and wraps around the ell-end where it might be considered a three decker. Every room, except the kitchen and the storeroom has at least two windows—some have three. The house has a total of ten rooms, disposed on three levels: four bedrooms on the second story level, the parlor, two bedrooms and dining room are on the first level, and the kitchen and storeroom on the semi-basement level.

The house sits directly on the street, without a front yard of any kind. Entrance is gained through a central stair-hall nearly eight feet wide, flanked on either side by a rectangular room. The same plan is repeated above, and there are fireplaces at each end of the front block. The ell contains two rooms on each level separated by a chimney-wall with workable fireplaces in the kitchen and both rooms on the first level. Simulated fireplaces are in the two rooms of the second story ell. The floors on both levels of the ell are two steps lower than those of the basic block. The central hall, both levels, and four of the rooms of the ell open onto the porches. Entrance to the rooms of the ell, with the exception of one, must be gained from the porches. The only means of communication between the semi-basement kitchen and the first floor dining room is by way of an outside set of steps. The walls of all rooms except the kitchen and storeroom are covered with period paper, matched as closely as possible to the original.

Every room has furniture either used by the Johnsons or having a Johnson connection, with many rooms basically furnished with Johnson items. Personal mementos such as the tilt-top table with 500 pieces of inlaid wood presented to the Johnsons by the people of Ireland, a hand-carved ivory basket presented to Mrs. Johnson by Queen Emma of the Hawaiian Islands, a silver service presented by the Loyal White Citizens of Nashville, hand carved canes, and many others to numerous to mention adorn and enhance the beauty of the simple but comfortable home of the ex-President.

There is nothing elaborate or fashionable about the Johnson Home, but rather the beauty of the house rests in a simplicity of design in keeping with an air of gracious yet unpretentious living. Although restoration tended to give the house an appearance of newness, the process of aging has begun to mellow this unavoidable

condition.

The cemetery in which rest the remains of Andrew Johnson is the third unit of the Andrew Johnson National Historic Site. The summit of this cone-shaped fifteen acre tract is dominated by a stately marble shaft rising some twenty-six feet from the base to its top, its apex being crowned by the noble figure of an American eagle, posed as for flight and looking away to its native mountain. Cut into the side of the shaft is a scroll depicting the Constitution, while draping the upper half is the flag of our country.

The cemetery tract was purchased by Andrew Johnson from John Maloney, on November 11, 1852. It consists of three pieces of land containing about twenty-three acres and lying in what was then called Western Greeneville. The majority of this land is so hilly that extensive building or tilling would seem impossible, but Johnson may have had some specific reason for buying the property. He loved the rolling hills of East Tennessee and the Appalachian Mountain range that separates his native State of North Carolina from his adopted State, Tennessee. From the most prominent cone-shaped hill of this 1852 purchase an inspiring panoramic view of the rolling countryside with its Appalachian background is one of the most picturesque in the upper East Tennessee area. During the Civil War years the area was known as Signal Hill, but after Johnson's death and interment in 1875, and the erection of the stately grave marker in 1878 by his family, the name gradually shifted to Monument Hill, a name that is still used by local citizenry.

The Army appropriations act of June 12, 1906, authorized the Secretary of War to accept, under the will of Martha J. Patterson and from the heirs of W. B. Bachman, free of cost to the Government, the 15-acre tract of land where Andrew Johnson's remains now lie, and establish thereon a national cemetery. Between the date of transfer in 1906 and May 23, 1942 the cemetery was administered by the Department of the Army. During this period burial sections were layed off, walkways and a road were built, a concrete wall was placed around the cemetery, a utility building and a Superintendent's residence were erected, and interments begun.

Andrew Johnson National Monument was established by presidential proclamation in 1942, and placed under the authority of the National Park Service. Prior to this time the Johnson Home-
stead had been purchased by the Federal Government, and the

Tailor Shop had been deeded to the United States Government by the State of Tennessee. Now, with the transfer of the National Cemetery by the War Department, the Park Service began development of the sites. Plans were immediately initiated to develop the area for better visitor enjoyment and education, but due to lack of sufficient funds, the National Park Service between 1942 and 1956 was not able to construct the needed space for proper operation and visitor orientation, nor present the Johnson Home, with its many additions, with any semblance of Andrew Johnson's occupancy. Preservation and maintenance of the area were about all that could be done during these years of war and national unrest.

With the initiation in 1956 of "Mission 66," a forward-looking program for the National Park System intended to so develop and staff these priceless possessions of the American people as to permit their wisest possible use; maximum enjoyment for those who use them; and maximum protection of the scenic, scientific, wilderness and historic resources that give them distinction, Andrew Johnson National Monument began to realize needed development. Between 1956 and early 1958 an addition was constructed to the building which houses the tailor shop, the offices and the museum space. A series of professionally designed and executed interpretive exhibits were installed in the museum to tell in a graphic and informative manner the story of Andrew Johnson and his role in American History. At the same time the home of Andrew Johnson underwent extensive restoration in order that the 1869-75 charm might be recaptured. Interpretive markers, informational markers, and directional signs were installed to assist the visitor in finding the various units of the National Monument and to tell him about it. On December 11, 1963, under the terms of Public Law 88-197, the name of the area was changed from Andrew Johnson National Monument to Andrew Johnson National Historic Site, and the house in which he lived from around 1838 until 1851 became a part of the Visitor Center (Tailor Shop) complex. Today, the visitor to the Andrew Johnson National Historic Site will find the area developed to the extent that he should be able to derive maximum enjoyment and inspiration from his visit.

The Andrew Johnson National Historic Site is dedicated to the memory of one of the most controversial Presidents in all of America's history. But it is dedicated even more to a man who

in state and nation devoted his every effort for the elevation of man; who knew the joy of triumph and endured the scorn of a powerful political faction whose malicious assaults are mainly responsible for one of America's great heroes of democratic government being denied, to any appreciable degree, the place in our heritage of which he is so deserving. The rise of this man from the depths of poverty, unparalleled by any before or since, lauds the greatness of the democratic way of life.

